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ABSTRACT

This study discusses 21 parent opinion surveys that were conducted by schools in Eugene (Oregon) School District 4J from 1972 to 1975. The information gathered and the types of questions asked on past questionnaires were examined by the district's Department of Research, Development, and Evaluation in an attempt to determine how to best conduct such surveys in the future. Table 1 lists the schools that sent out parent opinion questionnaires, the date each questionnaire was distributed, the response rate, and the number of questions asked. Table 2 lists the percentages of positive, negative, and no opinion responses by subject area for 11 of the 21 schools that conducted surveys. Some brief guidelines intended to aid schools in conducting accurate and useful surveys are also included. (Author/JG)

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SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J EUGENE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

200 North Monroe Eugene, Oregon 97402

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A REPORT ON PARENT OPINION SURVEYS

December, 1975
Division of Research, Development and Evaluation

EA 008 741

Introduction

The Department of Research, Development and Evaluation receives requests from principals and teachers for assistance in developing and sending out surveys. This study examines 21 parent opinion surveys. Types of questions were asked on past questionnaires and information gathered was looked at to see how such data might be useful when requests for assistance are received in the future. We were also interested in knowing if questionnaires were covering the same populations and asking basically the same questions, and we wondered if schools shared the results of their surveys. For example, can results of one survey be used to predict results of a potential survey for another school, thus saving time and money?

Methodology

Many types of surveys are done in the District. Because of financial and time constraints, it is not possible to collect and analyze all questionnaires. This study has been limited to parent opinion surveys, which cover a wide range of parent feelings concerning their children and school. The range of categories includes items such as grading, curriculum, discipline, staff, resources, lunch programs and homework. Schools which have conducted specific issue questionnaires have been noted (when principals mentioned them); however, these questionnaires were not analyzed.

Only the most recent parent opinion survey of each school was looked at. Therefore, if a school has completed the same survey for the past three consecutive years, only the data from the most recent year were analyzed.

Some surveys already existed in RD&E files. However, to collect others, each principal was contacted and asked whether a parent opinion survey had been done in the years 1972, 1973, 1974 or 1975. Those principals who answered "yes" were asked to send a copy of the questionnaire and a copy of the tabulated results. Table I lists the schools sending out parent questionnaires, the date sent, the response rate and the number of questions asked. There is a positive moderate statistical correlation of .47 between the response rate and the number of questions asked. This means there is somewhat of a tendency for questionnaires with more questions to have higher response rates. We looked at the types of questions and responses, and the rates of response.

Questions or general areas of questioning were pulled out from questionnaires and rates of response among different schools compared. Most of the questions divided response categories into five parts. For example, typical five-part response categories are:

Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Very satisfied	Satisfied	No opinion	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied

Table II lists the magnitude of the positive, negative, and no opinion answers by subject area for eleven of the twenty-one schools. The percentages for the categories "strongly agree" and "agree" and the percentages for the categories "very satisfied" and "satisfied" have been listed under the category "positive response." The percentages for the categories "disagree" and "strongly disagree" and the percentages for the categories "dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" have been listed under the category "negative response." "No opinion" responses and no responses have been listed under a combined heading of the two.

Almost all the questionnaires contained one or more questions that did not have fixed-category answers. A discussion of written answers to these open-ended questions appears later in the report.

Limitations

Previous to this study, no one in the District had collected and compared surveys. Thus, as mentioned before, this study does not attempt to look at all surveys. Some schools have sampled student and teacher opinions besides parent opinions. These surveys were not collected or analyzed. In 1974-75, general surveys such as the Needs Assessment sampled groups of teachers or principals in different schools. Also in 1974-75, the Communication Cadre staff surveys were done in Awbrey Park, Spencer Butte, Colin Kelly, Edgewood and Parker. The Communication Cadre also held an Action Research Meeting at Sheldon. That meeting allowed parents to write what they liked and disliked about a school and gave teachers and administrators an opportunity to hear and respond to the comments the same evening. Though Cadre surveys and other surveys are not included in this study, it is important to note all the levels at which sampling is being done.

Several schools have parent advisory committees which have used mail-out or hand-out surveys to collect parent opinions, while others have held discussion sessions. Such mail or hand-out surveys are included in this survey. One school used a telephone survey to collect parent opinions. Although this fact has been noted in Table I, the questions and responses were not analyzed.

Several schools have issued questionnaires to parents which address one specific issue. For example, Spring Creek Elementary polled parents concerning certain changes in the lunch program, while Churchill High School wanted opinions on the open campus policy. Schools which have done specific-issue questionnaires are noted in Table I. The questionnaires and responses have not been analyzed.

TABLE I

School	Survey	Date	Response Rate	Number of Questions
Action High School	yes			
Churchill High School	specific issue			
North Eugene High School	no			
Sheldon High School	no			
South Eugene High School	no			
Cal Young Junior High	yes	Feb. 1974	57%	15
Jefferson Junior High	yes	Aug. 1973	56%	16
Kelly Junior High	yes	June 1975	31%	23
Kennedy Junior High	yes	presently developing		
Madison Junior High	no			
Monroe Junior High	yes	Fall 1974		6
Roosevelt Junior High	yes			
Spencer Butte Junior High	yes	May 1973	72%	14
Adams Elementary	parent advisory			
Awbrey Park Elementary	yes	April 1975	85%	7
Bailey Hill Elementary	no			
Coburg Elementary	specific issue			
Condon Elementary	specific issue			
Crest Drive Elementary	yes	Feb. 1975	50%	31
Dunn Elementary	community school needs assessment			
Eastside	yes	Spring 1975	65%	25

Table I (continued)

School	Survey	Date	Response Rate	Number of Questions
Edgewood Elementary	yes	April 1975	approx. 42%	35
Edison Elementary	no			
Fox Hollow Elementary	specific issue			
Gilham Elementary	specific issue			
Harris Elementary	yes	Spring 1975		
Howard Elementary	yes	Spring 1975	44 returns	2 open-ended
Laurel Hill Elementary	no			
Lincoln Elementary	no			
Magladry Elementary	no			
McCornack Elementary	no			
Meadow Lark Elementary	yes	Spring 1975	24%	16
Parker Elementary	yes			22
Patterson Elementary	Title I			
River Road Elementary	Title I			
Santa Clara Elementary	no			
Silver Lea Elementary Corridor School Program	yes	June 1975	24%	9
Spring Creek Elementary	specific issue			
Twin Oaks Elementary	yes	presently .. developing		
Washington Elementary	yes	Jan. 1973	47%	28
Westmoreland Elementary	yes	Spring 1975	43%	35
Whiteaker Elementary	yes	Spring 1975		

Table I (continued)

School	Survey	Date	Response Rate	Number of Questions
Willagillespie Elementary	admin. evaluation			
Willakenzie Elementary	telephone survey			
Willard Elementary	Spring 1975			
South Region	yes	April 1975	unknown	unknown

Information

*After contacting each principal, 21 schools were identified which have done some type of parent opinion survey. This number does not include the six Title I schools which gather parent opinions as part of their evaluation.**

Table I provides a tally of those schools which have done a parent opinion survey since 1972. On a rudimentary level, the surveys fell into three basic types, depending on the kind of questions they asked:

1. *Objective questions*
2. *Open-ended questions*
3. *Mostly objective with some open-ended questions*

Eleven of the questionnaires were of the first type but gave parents the chance to write comments after each question or to respond to general open-ended questions at the end. Five of the questionnaires were totally objective except for a section at the end labeled "additional comments." One questionnaire was totally open-ended. It contained two questions, one asking what the parent liked about the school, the other asking what the parent disliked.

Response rates for the surveys varied from a low of 24% to a high of 72%, with the average return of 45.5%. The average should be taken as a rough estimate, since the response rate was not accurately kept track of in all cases. Some questionnaires were given out at parent meetings and the response rate was not tallied. In such cases, either the number of returns has been noted or the principal gave a "guesstimate." Because of this problem with response rates and because of the different formats of questionnaires, it is unfeasible to try to draw correlations between response rates and the number of questions.

Enough information was gathered on eleven surveys to look at them more closely. Schools which did those surveys are listed in Table II.

After examining questionnaires, the content of the questions was divided up and assigned to general categories. The particular categories were chosen because almost all of the content could be fit into one or the other of them. Below is each category with a brief description which hopefully will help the reader understand the types of questions which fall under the headings.

Overall satisfaction: Most questionnaires asked parents how happy they were with the overall education their child was receiving.

Curriculum: This question includes how parents feel about different segments of the instructional program. For instance, questions dealing with the reading, math, art, science, and music programs would fall under this category.

Cross-Age Grouping: The practice of putting different grade levels of students together.

Discipline: Questions asked whether parents were satisfied with present policies concerning discipline. A few questions were in the form of should, i.e., the school should involve parents in discipline policies.

Grading: Were parents happy with schools' present system of evaluation, be it grade cards, parent-teacher conferences, or written evaluations?

Electives: Were parents happy with electives available? Students' ease in getting into elective classes? Satisfaction with the number of electives a student was allowed to take?

Teaching Methods: Were parents happy with staff? Happy with methods used to get curriculum across to the students?

Resources: Materials available in the classroom, library, gym, etc. Did parents feel these resources adequate?

Extracurriculum Activities: Question concerning after-school activities such as athletics and drama.

Academic Counseling: Questions concerning advice students receive to help them choose classes.

Challenging and Interesting: Questions concerning the child's attitude toward school. Does the child look forward to going to school? Does the child find the material stimulating?

Semester Time Frame: Are parents satisfied with two semesters per school year?

Adequacy of Available Information about Classes: Is the information about school adequate, understandable, and what parents want to know?

General Communications between School and Home: Communication between teachers and parents, counselors and parents, administration and parents.

Ease in Visiting School: Do parents feel comfortable in visiting the school?

These categories are not necessarily inclusive of all areas of questioning covered by the surveys. Only categories addressed by two or more questionnaires have been included.

A scan of Table II shows that very few of the categories received less than 50% in the positive response category. In cases where positive response was less than 50%, the percentage in the category "no response" or "no opinion" was also high. For example, such is the case of Crest Drive Elementary in the category of "discipline." 27% of parents approve of discipline policies, while 38% disapprove. A significant 35% have no opinion, do not know what the discipline policies are, or did not respond to the question.

From Table II, it appears that a survey is more than likely to elicit positive responses on a majority of questions. This is generally true, although exceptions exist, such as fifth and sixth grade responses to the

Washington Elementary school questions about class size and discipline. A school intending to circulate a parent opinion survey should take note of this tendency. When parents are particularly upset about an issue, perhaps they choose other avenues besides completing questionnaires to register their displeasure. Several of the surveys only asked parents whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied about a particular item. Additional information is useful, especially if the school intends to make changes on the basis of opinions received from the parents. For example, several questionnaires asked the following question:

Are you satisfied with the school's grading system?

Very satisfied	*Satisfied*	*No opinion*	*Dissatisfied*	*Very dissatisfied*

This question gives parents no change to choose a system they might view as more positive even if they gave a positive response. If a negative response was marked, this question does not tell what alternative the parent desires.

Additional questions with should or prefer give the parent the opportunity to mark an alternative without having to take the time to write in a clarifying comment. Below are examples from one questionnaire.

I would prefer written evaluations of my child's progress.

Strongly agree	*Agree*	*No opinion*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*

I would prefer the use of letter grades to indicate my child's progress.

Strongly agree	*Agree*	*No opinion*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*

I would prefer teacher-parent conferences to indicate my child's progress.

Strongly agree	*Agree*	*No opinion*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*

Questions which appear to influence the answer received should also be avoided. For example, one questionnaire asked "I am interested in more electives being offered, realizing that something in the basic program will need to be dropped in order to get more electives into the curriculum, especially at the seventh and eighth grade levels.

Yes_____ No_____ No comment_____."

What is being offered here is a choice between "the basic program" and "more electives." The question is biased because the words "something in the basic program will have to be dropped" could be interpreted as encouraging no answers.

EUGENE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
School District 4J, Lane County

January 25, 1975

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT & EVALUATION

MEMO TO: Bev Juilfs

FROM: Charles E. Stephens

SUBJECT: Ratio of Divorced Mothers to Students by Elementary School

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information to the nursing staff for use in developing building assignments for individual nurses.

Two sources of data were utilized in preparing this report. First the number of mothers who identified themselves as divorced on the school registration form was extracted from the OTIS files. Please note that only number of individuals per school were extracted and in no case were the names of individuals available to those preparing this report. The second source was the December 20, 1974, consolidated classification report. Kindergarten enrollment was included based on the school actually attended.

A ratio of mothers listed as divorced to students enrolled was determined by dividing the school enrollment (K-6) by the number of mothers listed as divorced. These ratios ranged from 3.6 to 37.7. The mean value was 12.9 with a standard deviation of 8.2.

The ratios, enrollments (K-6) and number of mothers listed as divorced, by school, are given below:

SCHOOL	NUMBER OF MOTHERS LISTED AS DIVORCED	ENROLLMENT (K-6)	RATIO
Adams	28	339	12.1
Awbrey Park	34	574	16.8
Bailey Hill	46	401	8.7
Coburg	23	201	8.7
Condon	32	260	8.1
Crest Drive	8	232	29.0
Dunn	27	277	10.2
Edgewood	28	437	15.6
Edison	54	344	6.3
Fox Hollow	18	194	10.7
Gilham	31	335	10.8
Harris	15	246	16.4
Howard	47	537	11.4
Laurel Hill	7	142	20.2
Lincoln	70	255	3.6
Magladry	9	129	14.3
McCornack	48	351	7.3

SCHOOL	NUMBER OF MOTHERS LISTED AS DIVORCED	ENROLLMENT (K-6)	RATIO
Meadow Lark	43	420	9.7
Parker	24	303	12.6
Patterson	64	256	4.0
River Road	38	494	13.0
Santa Clara	34	440	12.9
Silver Lea	54	507	9.3
Spring Creek	28	494	17.6
Twin Oaks	7	264	37.7
Washington	41	467	11.3
Westmoreland	77	437	5.6
Whiteaker	69	258	3.7
Willagillespie	38	362	9.5
Willakenzie	10	362	36.2
Willard	44	363	8.2

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School	Overall Satisfaction			Curriculum			Cross Age Grouping			Discipline			Grading			Electives			Teaching Methods			Res
	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg		Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos
Cal Young Jr. High	80%	11%	9%										71%	19%	10%	8?%	10%	5%				
Jefferson Jr. High	72	21	7	85%	7%	8%	74 %	10%	16%				84	9	7	82	11	7				
Kelly Jr. High	77	14	9	67	14	19				35%	19%	46%	77	5	18							
Monroe Jr. High	89	8	2							94	4	2	85	4	11	72	21	7				
Spencer Butte Jr. High	90	6	4				68	13	19				81	9	10	87	9	4				
Roosevelt Jr. High																						
Awbrey Park Elementary				83	17	0	77	23	0	77	23	0	69	31	0							
Crest Drive Elementary	79	3	18	80	9	11				27	38	35							69%	8%	23%	66
Edgewood Elementary				66	18	16	72	20	8	44	33	23	95	3	2							
Meadowlark Elementary	72	8	20																			
Washington Elementary	77	16	7	74	16	10	69	16	15	72	24	4	71	22	7				84	9	7	
Westmore-land Elementary	65	19	16				21	62	17				52	31	17							4

Curriculum			Cross Age Grouping			Discipline			Grading		
Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg		Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*
									71%	19%	10%
85%	7%	8%	74 %	10%	16%				84	9	7
67	14	19				35%	19%	46%	77	5	18
						94	4	2	85	4	11
			68	13	19				81	9	10
83	17	0	77	23	0	77	23	0	69	31	0
80	9	11				27	38	35			
66	18	16	72	20	8	44	33	23	95	3	2
74	16	10	69	16	15	72	24	4	71	22	7
			21	52	17				52	31	17

Electives			Teaching Methods			Resources			Extra-Curricular Activities			Acade Couns
Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos
85%	10%	5%							75%	8%	17%	
82	11	7							62	9	29	65%
									54	6	40	
72	21	7							88	5	7	
87	9	4										61
			69%	8%	23%	66%	13%	21%				
			84	9	7							
						46	14	40				

Semester Time Frame			Adequacy of Info. About Courses			General Communication Between Parents and School			Ease in Visiting School		
Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*	Pos	Neg	*
						68%	23%	9%	77%	13%	10%
81%	7%	12%	71%	14%	15%	72	16	12			
			65	21	14						
83	6	11				64	15	21			
						85	15	0			
						80	8	12			
			42	29	29	74	12	14	76	10	14

Almost every questionnaire allowed space for written comments. Several reports of tabulated responses also contained pages of written comments, printed verbatim. In many cases, these comments seem hard to manage, since it is more difficult to undertake a content analysis of these than of the objective questions. Objective questions which take a should or prefer view and suggest alternatives may obtain the same type of information gathered in written comments and in an easier form to handle.

Summary

Schools which are thinking of mailing out or handing out a parent opinion survey should consider the following. If the school wants to find out whether it is doing an okay job, the results of previous surveys should be looked at. Chances are the school will receive at least 50% positive response to questions concerning the school's program, and communication between the school and home.

If the school still feels a survey to be necessary, a telephone sampling of parents may serve as well.

Surveys which would be most useful are those which give parents the opportunity to register more than approval or disapproval. Questions should gather only data which the school really wants to know and which will be used in making building decisions. Questions should suggest alternatives such as concrete changes parents can veto or approve.

The number of questions should be kept to a minimum--mostly objective with at least one opportunity for written comments. The authors of questionnaires should watch for bias in questions.

In the past, some schools have been lax when it comes to basic statistical accuracy. In the future, schools should be encouraged to tally the number of questionnaires sent out and the number returned, so that a valid response rate can be calculated. For such questions, the raw numbers should be calculated into percentages, i.e., % approve, % disapprove.

No opinions and no responses should also be calculated. These are especially important in determining whether parents know enough about a particular item to approve or disapprove.

Finally, the Research, Development and Evaluation Division wishes to express its appreciation for the cooperation it received in preparing this report.